



Montana DNRC Forested State Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan

2705 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804-3199



January 7, 2009

Name, Title
Company
Address
City, STATE ZIP

Dear Name:

We are pleased to announce that Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Trust Land Management Division (TLMD) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are planning on publishing and distributing the Montana DNRC Forested State Trust Lands Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Habitat Conservation Plan (Draft EIS/HCP) for public review in March/April 2009.

This letter serves to provide you with an overview of the HCP, an update on where we are in the planning process, and an opportunity to obtain a copy of the Draft EIS/HCP in March/April 2009.

HCP OVERVIEW

Since 2003, the DNRC has been voluntarily developing a multi-species HCP with technical assistance from the USFWS. The HCP is the plan under which DNRC intends to conduct forest management practices while conserving habitat for three species which are currently listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA): grizzly bear, Canada lynx, bull trout and two unlisted species: westslope cutthroat trout and Columbia redband trout (collectively referred to as the HCP species).

The DNRC TLMD is mandated to administer and manage timber, surface, and mineral resources on State trust lands for the benefit of the common schools and other endowed institutions in Montana under the direction of the State Board of Land Commissioners. The HCP would provide DNRC reasonable assurances for long-term compliance with the ESA while continuing to conduct forest management activities on State trust lands.

DNRC Trust Land Management Division Mission:

Our mission is to manage the State of Montana's trust land resources to produce revenue for the trust beneficiaries while considering environmental factors and protecting the future income-generating capacity of the land.

The HCP demonstrates how DNRC would avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts to the HCP species resulting from such activities. Such measures would contribute to the conservation of HCP species and would allow for, or not preclude, the recovery of the HCP species.

The HCP was prepared to meet regulatory compliance with Section 10 of the ESA. Under Section 10, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior and U.S. Secretary of Commerce may, where appropriate, authorize the taking of federally listed wildlife or fish if such taking occurs incidentally during otherwise lawful activities. This authorization is granted through an Incidental Take Permit (Permit).

The HCP is part of an application for a Permit that is submitted to the USFWS for review and approval. DNRC is requesting that the Permit be issued by USFWS for a period of 50 years to cover the following management activities on forested trust lands: timber harvest; road construction and maintenance; and grazing. If the HCP is approved and the Permit is granted, DNRC forest management staff would be responsible for implementation of the HCP.

Issuance of the Permit by USFWS is considered both a federal and state action that may affect the quality of the human environment, thus requiring preparation of an EIS under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). The EIS portion of the Draft EIS/HCP considers a no-action alternative and three HCP action alternatives.

HCP PLANNING PROCESS UPDATE

Citizen involvement is an important part of the HCP planning process. Public comments gathered during the initial scoping period in 2003 and the public review of the Draft Conservation Strategies in 2005 helped us identify resource information, key issues, and alternatives to the HCP. Since you last heard from us in 2005, the DNRC HCP Planning Team has been working to incorporate your comments and concerns into the Draft EIS/HCP. We are now preparing to publish the Draft EIS/HCP, and are hoping that you will take the opportunity to review the documents and send us your comments. The Draft EIS/HCP will be released in March/April 2009 followed by a 90-day public review period.

HOW TO REQUEST A COPY OF THE DRAFT EIS/HCP

If you would like to review the Draft EIS/HCP, there will be three ways to access the document: on-line, on CD, or on paper. In order to reduce costs and ensure prompt access to materials, we encourage you to view the document online at **dnrc.mt.gov/HCP** upon its release in March/April 2009. If you need a personal copy of the document, you may request a CD or paper copy. Also, if you would like to meet with the planning team in person, we'd like to know so that we may keep you informed of open-houses and public meetings we will be establishing in your area during the 90-day public review period.

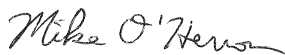
Please complete and return the enclosed postage-paid postcard and let us know:

- if you would like to receive a copy of the Draft EIS/HCP,
- in what form you would prefer to receive it, and
- if you would like to meet with the HCP Planning Team during the 90-day public review period.

We ask that you please respond to us by postcard, phone, or email no later than **Monday, January 26th** to request a copy of the Draft EIS/HCP (*see Contact Information*).

For more detailed information about the HCP, please visit our website at **dnrc.mt.gov/HCP**. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to email or call us at any time (*see Contact Information*). We look forward to hearing from you soon. We value your participation as an important component of trust land management planning.

Thank you,



Mike O'Herron
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CONTACT INFORMATION

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